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RETAIL INFLATION EASES TO 5.3% IN AUG AS FOOD PRICES SOFTEN

Subdued prices of food items like vegetables pulled down retail inflation for the third month in a row, within RBI's comfort zone

VEGETABLE PRICES CONTRACT 11.7% IN AUGUST

Consumer Price Index-based retail inflation was 5.59% in July and 6.69% in August 2020. According to data released by National Statistics Office on Monday, food inflation decelerated to 3.71% in August from 4% in July as vegetable prices contracted 11.68% during the month. RBI primarily considers retail inflation to decide the monetary policy every two months

RECORD KHARIF PRODUCTION LIKELY: GOVT

The Centre expects foodgrain production to touch a new record of over 150 million tonnes in 2021-22 crop year (July-June)
"We have received good rains so far this year... foodgrain production will definitely be much higher than last year's Kharif season," Agriculture Secretary Sanjay Agarwal said on Monday

5.7%

RBI'S PROJECTION OF RETAIL INFLATION DURING 2021-22

Govt cites security to duck full Pegasus affidavit

Supreme Court says it will pass interim order in two-three days

KANU SARDA @ New Delhi

WITH the Centre again refusing to file a detailed affidavit on whether or not it used the Pegasus software to snoop on journalists and members of the civil society, the Supreme Court on Monday said it will pass its interim order on a batch of petitions in a two-three days.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the Centre did not want matters of national interest to be part of public discourse or judicial debate through an affidavit. "Existence of whether a particular software was used or not cannot become part of an affidavit or subject of public discourse. Target groups, terror groups should not know what software is being used," Mehta told the bench led by Chief Justice of

India N V Ramana.

"We will set up a committee of domain experts. The petitioners who say their numbers were put under interception can be considered by the committee. The committee report will be placed before your lordships," Mehta added.

But the bench said Mehta was beating around the bush. "We just wanted you to clarify whether their (civil society) privacy was violated or not. Whether surveillance, if done at all, was after lawful permission. Was the interception done by any agency unlawfully? Should the government not be

concerned if any 'outside agency' had violated our citizens' privacy?" it asked. Mehta responded saying that he had already filed an affidavit saying there was no unauthorised interception.

Pointing out that it had given fair opportunity to the Centre to make its statement, the CJI said, "Now we have to look into the whole issue and decide something."

The court then reserved its interim orders. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for journalists N Ram and Sashi Kumar, who are among the petitioners, said the government cannot tell the SC to 'shut your eyes'.

SIBAL'S COUNTER

"My friend (Mehta) says making that statement on oath itself is detrimental to national security. I am sorry, it is detrimental to the process of justice," Kapil Sibal said

Space is the limit for private sector, startups

PEARL MARIA D'SOUZA @ Bengaluru

INDIAN private companies in the space technology sector can look forward to playing an active role in India's space industry and significantly increase its share in the \$440 billion global space sector from its present 2 per cent. This was the message at the International Space Conference, organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) virtually on Monday.

Pawan Goenka, recently appointed Chairman-Designate, Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe), set a target of achieving 10 per cent of the global space market share, and pointed out that India's private investment in the startup ecosystem in this sector was about \$22 million. This is less than half a percent of investments made in startups in the space sector globally. More investments are needed, he said.

IN-SPACe, an organisation under India's Department of

Space (DoS), is a single-window nodal agency to facilitate and regulate space activities in the country. "While the government sector will continue to push frontiers of science and technology, we should have the private sector move aggressively to pursue the space sector," he said.

There are a lot of untapped opportunities for Indian companies to supply outside the country. "That is not happening in a big way as yet. We need to understand why and how we can increase that," he said.

There is an interest in the private sector and tech startups in the space sector over the last three to four years. "The only way to work increase their share is to set a target, find a strategy, put action plans together, define responsibilities for stakeholders and monitor progress," said Goenka, who has planned to meet stakeholders over the next few weeks to get a sense of issues that are holding the sector back, and define a timeline for goals set. P7

JAB-O-METER	September 12
TAKE YOUR SHOT	72,86,883 doses
September 13	67,04,768 doses
TOTAL DOSES	75,10,41,391

WHO to recognise Covaxin in a week?
The World Health Organization may recognise Covaxin in a week, sources said. If that happens, it will bring relief to those who have taken the vaccine. P9

NATIONWIDE	SEPT 12	SEPT 13
Fresh cases	28,591	27,254
Recoveries	34,848	37,687
Deaths	338	219
KARNATAKA	SEPT 12	SEPT 13
Fresh cases	803	673
Recoveries	802	1,074
Deaths	17	13



MONSOON MARCH

Farmers protest against the Centre's three contentious farm laws in Bengaluru on Monday. They were later stopped by the police, as they marched towards Vidhana Soudha, where the monsoon session has begun | ASHISH KRISHNA NP | P2

INFO HEADS URGE CJI TO SHOO HCs OFF TURF

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

A group of 15 sitting and retired information commissioners last week wrote to Chief Justice of India N V Ramana, urging him to direct high courts not to entertain petitions against orders passed by the Central Information Commission (CIC).

Section 23 of the RTI Act says, "No court shall entertain any suit, application or other proceedings in respect of any order made under this act and no such order shall be called in question otherwise than by way of an appeal under this Act."

So, Parliament clearly intended that the final appeal will lie with the Information commissions, the letter

pointed out. Yet, directions of information commissioners were being negated due to high court stay orders.

"At the very least orders of imposition of penalty should not be stayed as no irrevocable harm can come to the penalised official. It should also be ensured that if any stay order is given it should give reasons for staying the statutory order of the commission, the letter said.

Its signatories include two sitting state information commissioners of Madhya Pradesh, Rahul Singh and G Krishnamurthy, four retired central information commissioners and one retired chief central information commissioner.

The CIC has been set up under the RTI Act.



JOHN KERRY

SAYS ZERO-EMISSION TARGET IS FOR ALL

Visiting US special presidential climate envoy said it is imperative that all parties commit to it, adding India and US are working towards speedier deployment of clean energy | P9

Oscar Fernandes passes away at 80, leaving a big void in Congress

VINCENT D'SOUZA @ Mangaluru

IT was January 1980 and the country was getting ready for the seventh Lok Sabha elections. Handwritten posters surfaced on the walls across the erstwhile Udupi Lok Sabha constituency, which stretched from Bantwal to Byndoor then. The posters demanded that the Congress (I) ticket be given to a 39-year-old man, who had just been a Udupi Municipality Councillor for one term and did not have any experience in winning big elections.

Initially, then Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president S Bangarappa, senior leader R Gundu Rao and others sought to ignore the posters as they were looking for a strong candidate to take on TA Pai of Congress (U), a heavyweight who had also served as a union minister handling several big portfolios, including the railways and heavy industries. But the wave sweeping in favour of this political novice was such that they had could not ignore him for long and had to finally give in to people's demand. A few days later, Indira Gandhi who was in Karwar, asked the young man whether he could win against Pai and he smiled and nodded his head. The rest is history. The young man, Oscar Fernandes, went on to deci-



OSCAR FERNANDES 1941-2021

mate Pai and win the election by a big margin.

Oscar, who was 80 years old, passed away on Monday in Mangaluru. This must only heighten the political loneliness of Congress interim president Sonia Gandhi, who has lost within a gap of one year two of her most trusted aides, Oscar and Ahmed Patel, who passed away in November last year.

While Patel was a trouble-shooter managing contradictions within the party, Oscar was a quintessential organisational man who promoted younger leaders. Oscar's close proximity to the Gandhi family began when he became the parliamentary secretary of then PM Rajiv Gandhi and it continued with Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, making him an invaluable leader for the party. P4

Congress vicharaks vs RSS pracharaks in UP

RICHA SHARMA @ New Delhi

IN a bid to connect with people on the ground ahead of the crucial Assembly elections, the Congress plans to deploy 'vicharaks' on the lines of RSS 'pracharaks'. These young activists, primarily members of the Congress' grassroots front organisation Seva Dal, will visit select constituencies and have meaningful talks with voters on pressing issues such as price rise, unemployment and farmer distress. The experiment will also

mark an image makeover for the Seva Dal, whose role and responsibilities were tweaked after Rahul Gandhi became party chief in 2017, by actively engaging in election campaign and public outreach programmes in states where it has good presence. The organisation has around 3.7 lakh active members in over 600 districts. It has around 450 members in UP.

"It is vicharaks vs pracharaks. We are training our workforce to focus on people's agen-

da away from emotional and religious agenda of the RSS and other parties ahead of elections. Members of Seva Dal will work in tandem with state units to reach out to people and talk to them on pressing issues," said Lalji Desai, chief organiser, Seva Dal.

He says the team is young and dynamic with 80% of them below 45 years. They have been divided in three groups — Seva Dal young brigade, Seva Dal and Mahila Seva Dal. They have been trained in

efficiently using social media tools to communicate with youths and working class.

Congress Seva Dal, which was once seen more as a ceremonial organisation, has zeroed in on 100 constituencies in Uttar Pradesh where their members would be campaigning for the party. The selection was based on research by team members and work will start after the final go-ahead from Congress general secretary and in-charge for UP Priyanka Gandhi and UP Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu.

CM to set aside 4 hours a week to address party MLAs' grievances

MG CHETAN @ Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister Basavaraj Bommai has decided to set aside four hours every week to hear out the party MLAs and address their concerns.

This will put an end to the constant grouse of BJP MLAs since the party came to power in 2019 that the chief minister and ministers have not been available to them. Bommai's

decision is to address this disgruntlement, party sources said.

At the BJP Legislature Party meeting held on Monday, the chief minister proposed to interact with the MLAs from 8 am to noon every Thursday, according to Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister JC Madhuswamy.

"MLAs can talk about issues related to their constituency or

the party. Soon, ministers too will meet the legislators," Madhuswamy added.

To ensure better coordination among legislators and to prepare them to face the opposition, the party has decided to convene a legislators' party meeting every Tuesday between 9.30 am and 11 am when the House is in session, Madhuswamy said.

CONTINUED ON P4